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A Year With the Birds

A Year With the Birds

BY

ALICE E. BALL

Illustrated by

ROBERT BRUCE HORSFALL

PAINTER OF BACKGROUNDS IN HABITAT GROUPS

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

NEW YORK CITY

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April, 1916

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TO MY SISTER

SUSAN L. BALL

BEST COMRADE OF THE WOODS AND FIELDS

AND TO ALL BIRD-LOVERS

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

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Introduction

Mr. Frank M. Chapman in his "Birds of Eastern North America" says:—

> "The best time in the year to begin studying birds is in the winter, when the bird population of temperate regions is at the minimum. The problem of identification is thus reduced to its simplest terms and should be mastered before spring introduces new elements."

Those who have at any time endeavored to initiate young people into the mysteries of bird-study, know how truly Mr. Chapman has spoken. They also know that children, notwithstanding their keen sense-perceptions, become confused if too many details are presented, but seize eagerly upon striking characteristics of a bird's structure, color and markings.

Long experience has developed the plan of this book, which presents first the most common permanent residents and winter visitors, and then introduces in proper order each newcomer of early spring, before the woods and fields become so filled with songsters as to render identification almost hopeless to a beginner.

The descriptions are intended to emphasize distinguishing points in each bird's appearance and song, or to show his most pronounced traits; the illustrations, not only to give a true picture of the bird himself, but of the environment where he is most frequently found.

As rhyme and rhythm are delightful to children, it is hoped that the verses will aid in fixing many truths in their minds and that the book may fill a great need in schools. It aims at accuracy of statement but not to be a technical hand-book, as there are so many

excellent ones on the market. It is hoped that it may make friends, not only among young people, but among "children of a larger growth."

I wish to express my deep appreciation to Mr. T. Gilbert Pearson, Secretary of the National Association of Audubon Societies, for his generosity in allowing me the use of twenty-two Audubon plates, for his kindly interest and encouragement, and for his criticism of the manuscript and drawings.

I acknowledge gratefully Mr. Frank M. Chapman's careful inspection of every drawing and his kindness in loaning to Mr. Horsfall a number of bird-skins from the American Museum of Natural History, New York City.

I am deeply indebted to Houghton Mifflin & Co. for their generous permission to use the following poems and quotations:

Edith Thomas's "Nuthatch," "Vesper Sparrow," "Catbird" and "Morning in Birdland;" Celia Thaxter's "Sandpiper;" Lucy Larcom's "Field Sparrow," "Sir Robin," (in part,) and four lines on bird-song; Frank Bolles' Oven-Bird;" Frank Dempster Sherman's "Bird Music;" E. R. Sill's "Spring Twilight;" Edna Dean Proctor's "Bluebird;" Ednah Proctor Clarke's "Hummingbird;" Edgar Fawcett's "To an Oriole;" Maurice Thompson's "Kingfisher;" Edmund Clarence Stedman's "Flight of the Birds;" three stanzas from William Caldwell's "Robin's Come," two from Emerson's "Titmouse," two from James Ryder Randall's "Why the Robin's Breast Was Red," and two from Mrs. A. D. T. Whitney's "Sparrows;" one stanza from J. T. Trowbridge's "Pewee," and extracts from Longfellow's "Birds of Killingworth," Lowell's "Vision of Sir Launfal;" Maurice Thompson's and T. B. Aldrich's lines on

the bluebird, J. T. Trowbridge's on the thrush, Lowell's on the oriole and Stuart Sterne's on warblers.

To the courtesy of D. Appleton & Co. I am indebted for Bryant's "Robert of Lincoln," "To a Waterfowl," and two stanzas of "The Return of the Birds;" also for the diagram of the goldfinch's song, Wilson Flagg's interpretation of the red-eyed vireo's song, and John Burrough's rendering of the oven-bird's song, all found in Mr. Chapman's "Birds of Eastern North America." (Copyright, 1903.)

I wish to acknowledge the kind permission of Charles Scribner's Sons to use three stanzas of Henry van Dyke's "Song Sparrow" and two of his "Maryland Yellow-throat;" also that of Little, Brown & Co. for the right to use Helen Hunt Jackson's "The Way to Sing."

A. E. B.

PART ONE

Winter Residents and Visitors

Winter Residents and Visitors

Blue Jay
Cardinal
*Junco
*Snowflake or Snow Bunting
*Tree Sparrow or Winter Chippy
Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
*Cedar Waxwing
White-breasted Nuthatch
Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers
*Brown Creeper
*Crossbill
Bob White or Quail

---

*NOTE.—Snow Buntings migrate to the North the latter part of March; Brown Creepers and Tree Sparrows, from April 1 to 30; Juncos, from April 10 to May 10. Waxwings and Crossbills are irregular visitors.

Our Winter Neighbors

When Summer journeys toward fair southern lands,
Her migrants follow close in roving bands;
Contented, there they dwell, until the Spring
Beguiles them back again on eager wing.

* * * * *

Then radiant Autumn, clad in red and gold,
Kills insect swarms with touch both swift and cold;
But o'er the birds that linger, she doth keep
A vigil keen, till she "lies down to sleep."

A bounteous feast of berries, nuts and seeds
With care she hung, on trees and shrubs and weeds;
Old Winter calls the birds to share this cheer
In field and forest, while the days are drear.

Then flaps the noisy crow, with raucous cry;
The jay gleams like a sapphire 'gainst the sky;
The cardinal shines, a ruby in the snow;
To sheltered thickets quails in coveys go.

Slate-colored juncos flock near chickadees;
Nuthatches wander up and down the trees.
Up climb the downy and the creeper small;
The crested titmouse sounds his cheery call.

A flock of waxwings seek the cedar-tree,
Or coral-laden ash or barberry.
The crossbills feast in groves of spruce and pine;
On seeds in meadows winter-sparrows dine.

Their sweet-voiced goldfinch cousins, clad in brown;
The tiny kinglet, with the golden crown;
The owl, the shrike, the soaring hawk so bold,
All brave Old Winter's stirring, stinging cold.

Long bitter nights they hide, when blasts blow keen,
In hollow trunks, or groves of evergreen;
Throughout the dreary days their voices ring,
And life to forests gaunt and chill they bring.

A. E. B.

The Blue Jay

The Blue Jay

A flash of blue, a dash of white,
  Gleam from the branches dead,
As from oaks to beeches and hickories flits
  The jay with the crested head;
Then in crannies the acorns and nuts he stores,
  His winter's feast to spread.

'Tis said he's the dread of the feathered-folk,—
  This robber in bright array—
That they mourn when he drives them from new-built nests,
  Or carries their eggs away,
And cry aloud when he takes their young,
  With his "Yăh, yăh, jay!"

Devoted is he to his nestlings and mate,
  Or to jays that are feeble and old;
Delightfully gentle his household ways,
  Though his neighbors he loves to scold.
"Pedunkle! Pedunkle! Parlez-vous!"
  Sweet tones his voice can hold.

He's a handsome, noisy, unsociable bird,—
  An amusing mimic and tease;
He's the bane of the sleepy, half-blind owls,
  Till the mischievous fellow they seize;
But in spite of his pranks, we like him well,
  This clever knave of the trees.

A. E. B.

BLUE JAY

The Cardinal

The Cardinal

When autumn woods are bare and dead,
A crested bird, of cardinal red,
Sways like an oak-leaf overhead;
And sighs, "D d d
r r r
e e e
a a a
r! r! r!"

When winter woods are white with snow,
And drifts pile high as wild winds blow,
Like flame this torchlike bird doth glow;
And cries, "W w w
h h h
e e e
w! w! w!"

When springtime's crimson buds appear,
And red-gold columbines are here,
This songster welcomes the new year;
And sings, "C c c
h h h
e e e
e e e
r! r! r!"

When summer's sun sheds scorching beams,
And cardinal flowers beside the streams
Grow wild, this brilliant bird still gleams;
And whistles, "H h h
u u u
e! e! e!"

A. E. B.

CARDINAL

The Junco
or
Slate-Colored Snowbird

The Junco or Slate-Colored Snowbird

When the first gray days of autumn
  With their chill, have driven away
Many merry bird-musicians
  That made blithe each summer day;
Or when leaden skies brood o'er us,
  And the snowflakes whirl about,
Wings a cloud-gray flock, snow-breasted,
  To the thickets, in and out,
Fluttering gently, lisping sweetly,—
  Cheery, friendly junco throng,—
Neighbors till in April sunshine
  North they fly, with trilling song.

A. E. B.

JUNCO

The Snowflake
or
Snow Bunting

The Snowflake or Snow Bunting

Across the fields we see them go—
Old brown leaves, driven by the snow.

* * * * *

Are not the dead leaves clinging fast
To oak or beech, or from the blast
All deeply hidden? Can it be
That they are whirling rapidly?

Ah! Now we hear a sharp, clear "Chur"
As they speed onward with a whir;
Upon the snow they settle down,
All white and black and leafy brown.

They're but a gentle Snowflake band;
Their Mother Earth has laid a hand
On head and throat and soft white dress
Of each, and left a brown impress.

While they're our winter guests, they wear
These russet coats; but when they fare
To Arctic lands, their summer home,
In robes of black-and-white they roam.

A. E. B.

SNOWFLAKE

The Tree Sparrow
or
Winter Chippy

The Tree Sparrow or Winter Chippy

When lordly Winter stalks abroad,
  With trailing robes of snow,
That hide the lovely tender things
  His icy breath lays low;
When grasses, shrubs and hardy weeds
  Hold high their heads, and mock
Their tyrant lord,—from Northland woods
  There comes a merry flock
Of feathered songsters, soft and brown,
  With a dark spot on each breast;
They sway on stalk of golden-rod
  Above a snowdrift's crest.
Their voices ring like tinkling bells
  Beneath the wintry sky,
Till April, when with joyous songs
  Back to the North they fly.

A. E. B.

TREE SPARROW

The Chickadee
or
Black-capped Titmouse
and
The Tufted Titmouse

The Chickadee

I am cheery, black-capped Chickadee,
With my head as dark as the duskiest tree;
I'm as gray as the boughs of the beeches bare,
And as white as the snow that is lodging there;
While my sides are tinged like the willow wands,
That rim with yellow the streams and ponds.

As I dart about, as I swing and I sway,
No blinding storm doth me dismay,
For I'm borne with the flakes as they scurry along
And I gleefully sing my tiny song:
"Chick-a-dee-dee-dee! Chick-a-dee-dee-dee!
This world holds nothing but good for me."

When insect eggs are incased in ice
In the crystalled trunks, I fly in a trice
To the homes of the human friends I know,
Who have spread me a feast on the crusted snow.
"Chick-a-dee-dee-dee! Chick-a-dee-dee-dee!
Oh, wouldn't you like to make friends with me?"

A. E. B.

CHICKADEE

The Chickadee
or
Black-Capped Titmouse

Piped a tiny voice hard by,
Gay and polite, a cheerful cry,
"Chic-Chic-a-dee-dee!" saucy note
Out of sound heart and merry throat,
As if it said, "Good-day, good Sir!
Fine afternoon, old passenger!
Happy to meet you in these places
Where January brings few faces."

This poet, though he live apart,
Moved by his hospitable heart,
Sped, when I passed his sylvan fort,
To do the honors of his court,
As fits a feathered lord of land;
Flew near, with soft wing grazed my hand,
Hopped on the bough, then, darting low,
Prints his small impress on the snow,
Shows feats of his gymnastic play,
Head downward, clinging to the spray.

Emerson's "Titmouse"

The Tufted Titmouse

I am Chickadee's cousin!
  I am gray tinged with red;
No black velvet cap
  Do I wear on my head.
I've a tuft of soft feathers,
  Like an Indian chief's,
With which I express
  My joys and my griefs.

I am merry and lively—
  An active athlete;
I can turn somersaults,
  An acrobat's feat.
If my loud ringing call
  You should hear far away,
You can find me with ease;
  This is what I will say:
"Pé-to! Pé-to! Pé-to! Pé-to! Pé-to!"

A. E. B.

TUFTED TITMOUSE

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The Cedar Waxwing

The Cedar Waxwing

A beautiful gray-brown bird is he,
  With a crest on his velvet head,
Which stands erect when he is surprised,
  And is flattened tight in dread;
When contented and happy loose it lies—
  As when he is bountifully fed.

His wings and tail are of softest gray
  That blend to a darker shade;
On his wings are scarlet wax-like tips
  That seem by magic made;
On his breast and the band across his tail
  The "Golden Touch" was laid.

He and his roving flock alight
  Where berries and seeds they spy;
Well-fed, they perch on a bough of a tree
  In a row, remote and shy;
They preen their coats, and whisper and lisp,
  And then away they fly.

A. E. B.

CEDAR WAXWING

The White-Breasted Nuthatch
The Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers

The White-Breasted Nuthatch

I'm the nuthatch—white-breasted,
  Black, rusty, blue-gray,
Long-billed and bright-eyed.
  Over tree-trunks I stray,
Up, down, all about—
  Wherever I see
Tiny eggs in the bark,
  Tucked away cunningly.

I've a short, square-cut tail;
  I need no firm prop
Like the woodpecker tribe,
  Or the creepers. I hop
On my large, sturdy feet
  Where I please without fear;
And my cheery "Crank-crank"
  You will frequently hear.

When not searching for food
  On a cold winter's day,
Near Chickadee, Downy,
  Or Titmouse I stay;
During long, bitter nights
  We may nestle—snug, warm—
In a woodpecker's hole,
  Sheltered safe from the storm.

A. E. B.

NUTHATCH

The Nuthatch

Shrewd little haunter of woods all gray,
Whom I meet on my walk of a winter day,
You're busy inspecting each cranny and hole
In the ragged bark of yon hickory bole;
You intent on your task, and I on the law
Of your wonderful head and gymnastic claw!

The woodpecker well may despair of this feat—
Only the fly with you can compete!
So much is clear; but I fain would know
How you can so reckless and fearless go,
Head upward, head downward, all one to you,
Zenith and nadir the same in your view?

Edith M. Thomas

*The Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers

Tree-dwelling insects must quiet be,
When Downy knocks at their door in a tree;
His ears are so sharp, if they stir a mite,
He will dig them out for a toothsome bite.
And when in winter they all are dead,
You'll see his bobbing, red-capped head
In search of the eggs they've hidden away,
In the trunks of the trees, now gaunt and gray.

Downy and Hairy look as though
They had had a frolic in the snow;
Had tumbled about till their breasts were white,
And with Jack Frost had a snowball fight,
Till their backs were streaked, and flecked were their wings;
The grove with their cheerful voices rings!
Can they be playing hide-and-seek?
Just hear them call, "Peek—peek! Peek—peek!"

A. E. B.

*NOTE.—Lower figure—Hairy Woodpecker; middle figure, without red on head—Female Downy; upper figure—Male Downy.

DOWNY AND HAIRY WOODPECKERS

The Brown Creeper

The Brown Creeper

I am Little Brown Creeper—
  White-flecked and pale gray,
With no red on my head
  Like the woodpeckers gay.

They climb up the trees;
  Nuthatches run down;
I circle the trunks—
  A tiny sprite brown.

With my long curving bill
  Eggs of insects I seek,
And I timidly call,
  "Skreek-Skreek, skreek-skreek!"

You may find me in winter,
  A visitor shy;
In the spring, to my home
  In the North woods I fly.

A. E. B.

BROWN CREEPER

The Crossbill

The Crossbill

In legends old, one reads
  That when our Lord they slew
Upon a cross, a pitying bird
  To the suffering Savior flew,
And tried to draw the nails
  From the mangled hands that bled;
Till he twisted his slender little bill,
  And stained his breast blood-red.

But searching eyes have learned
  The truth that the crossbill's beak
Is fashioned thus, to withdraw the seeds
  From the cones he loves to seek;
And we marvel anew at the way
  A Master Mind and Hand
Has created these wonderful wingèd things,
  And for their welfare planned.

A. E. B.

CROSSBILL

Bob White or Quail

Bob White or Quail

"Bob White? Bob, Bob White?"
Was ever more joy—more pure delight—
Revealed in a voice? Mayhap you'll see
The singer building his home with glee—
A shallow nest, o'erhung with weeds,
And lined with grass, to suit the needs
Of a wife and a dozen babies small.
(If she were to die, he'd attend to them all!)

The lively nestlings! They run around
As soon as they're hatched, and on the ground
Find seeds of weeds and insect food.
In autumn, the parents and all the brood
Wander in meadows to glean the grain.
Each night they gather together again,—
A family circle, on leafy beds,—
And outward point their stripèd heads.

All brown and quiet, like leaves they lie
Till you're right upon them; then "Whir-r-!"
and they fly.
If the covey are scattered, they tenderly call
Again and again, till assembled are all.
In winter to thickets and bogs they retreat;
When snow falls, berries and seeds they eat;
A loving family they live till May,
When each chooses a mate and wanders away.

A. E. B.

BOB-WHITE

PART TWO

The Early Spring Birds

Spring Migration

FEBRUARY 15th to MARCH 10th

Song Sparrow
Bluebird
Robin
Purple Grackle
Red-winged Blackbird

MARCH 10th to 31st

Cowbird
Phoebe
Flicker
Meadowlark
Mourning Dove
Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker
Field Sparrow

APRIL 1st to 20th

Vesper Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow
Towhee
Tree Swallow
Barn Swallow

APRIL 20th to 30th

Purple Martin
Chimney Swift
Whip-poor-will
House Wren
Ovenbird
Wood Thrush
Brown Thrasher
Catbird

MAY 1st to 10th

Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Nighthawk
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Indigo Bunting
Baltimore Oriole
Orchard Oriole
Scarlet Tanager
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Bobolink
Goldfinch
Yellow Warbler
Maryland Yellow-throat
Red-eyed Vireo
Wood Pewee
Kingbird
Sandpiper

The Mockingbird is a resident of our southern and western states.

Spring

Now that the winter's gone, the earth hath lost
Her snow-white robes; and now no more the frost
Candies the grass or casts an icy cream
Upon the silver lake or crystal stream:
But the warm sun thaws the benumbèd earth,
And makes it tender; gives a sacred birth.

* * * * *

Now do a choir of chirping minstrels bring
In triumph to the world the youthful spring!

Thomas Carew

*The Return of the Birds

I hear, from many a little throat,
  A warble interrupted long;
I hear the robin's flute-like note,
  The bluebird's slenderer song.

Brown meadows and the russet hill,
  Not yet the haunt of grazing herds,
And thickets by the glimmering rill,
  Are all alive with birds.

Bryant

---

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The Song Sparrow

"See? See? See? The herald of spring you see!
What matter if winds blow piercingly!
The brook, long ice-bound, struggles through
Its glistening fetters, and murmurs anew
With joy at the freedom the days will bring
When the snow has gone! And I, too, sing!

"See? See? See? A flush of color you see!
The tassels are hung on the budding tree,
Before it has drawn its curtain of leaves
To shade the homes of the birds. Now weaves
The silent spring a carpet fair,
With wind-flower and hepatica there.

"See? See? See? You are glad to welcome me.
You will hear my voice ring cheerfully
Through Summer's heat or days of rain,
Till cruel Winter has come again.
From dawn till dusk, my heart is gay,
And I sing my happy life away.
See? See? See?"

A. E. B.

SONG SPARROW

*The Song Sparrow

He comes in March, when winds are strong,
  And snow returns to hide the earth;
  But still he warms his heart with mirth,
And waits for May. He lingers long
  While flowers fade; and every day
  Repeats his small, contented lay;
As if to say, we need not fear
The season's change, if love is here
With "Sweet—sweet—sweet—very merry cheer."

He does not wear a Joseph's-coat
  Of many colours, smart and gay;
  His suit is Quaker brown and gray,
With darker patches at his throat.
  And yet of all the well-dressed throng
  Not one can sing so brave a song.
It makes the pride of looks appear
A vain and foolish thing, to hear
His "Sweet—sweet—sweet—very merry cheer."

A lofty place he does not love,
  But sits by choice, and well at ease
  In hedges, and in little trees
That stretch their slender arms above
  The meadow-brook; and there he sings
  Till all the field with pleasure rings;
And so he tells in every ear
That lowly homes to heaven are near
In "Sweet—sweet—sweet—very merry cheer."

Henry van Dyke

---

*NOTE—Reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

The Bluebird

O bird of blue, with your robe from the sky,
  And a flame in your red-brown breast,
When the home-love burns, from the South you fly,
  To the chill of your northern nest.
"Tru-ly—tru-ly—tru-ly."

O wonderful bird with the loyal heart,
  To your home and mate you are true;
Our own hearts leap, when the cold March days
  Bring the first glad sight of you.
"Tru-ly—tru-ly—tru-ly."

O beautiful bird with the tender note
  You sing of the days to be;
You promise bright skies and an earth renewed,
  And we wait expectantly.
"Tru-ly—tru-ly—tru-ly."

A. E. B.

BLUEBIRD

The Bluebird

Hark! 'tis the bluebird's venturous strain
  High on the old fringed elm at the gate:
    Sweet-voiced, valiant on the swaying bough,
      Alert, elate,
    Dodging the fitful spits of snow,
  New England's poet laureate
Telling us that Spring has come again!

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

From stake to stake a bluebird flew
  Along the fence and sang.

From Maurice Thompson's "Plowboy"

The Bluebird

I am so blithe and glad today!
At morn I heard a bluebird sing;
The bluebird, warbling soul of spring,
The prophet of the leafy May,—
And I knew the violets under the tree
Would listen and look the birds to see,
Peeping timidly, here and there,
In purple and odor to charm the air;
And the wind-flower lift its rose-veined cup,
In the leaves of the old year buried up;
And all the delicate buds that bloom
On the moss-beds, deep in the forest gloom,
Would stir in their slumber, and catch the strain
And dream of the sun and the April rain,—
For spring has come when the bluebird sings,
And folds in the maple his glossy wings,
And the wind may blow, and the storm may fall,
But the voice of summer is heard in all.

I am so blithe and glad today!
My heart, beside the bluebird, sings,
And folds serene its weary wings,
And knows the hours lead on to May.

Edna Dean Proctor

The Robin
The Blackbird

Robin's Come

From the elm-tree's topmost bough,
  Hark! the Robin's early song!
Telling one and all that now
  Merry spring-time hastes along;
Welcome tidings dost thou bring
Little harbinger of spring,
                Robin's come!

Of the winter we are weary,
  Weary of the frost and snow.
Longing for the sunshine cheery,
  And the brooklet's gurgling flow;
Gladly then we hear thee sing
The reveille of spring,
                Robin's come!

Ring it out o'er hill and plain,
  Through the garden's lovely bowers,
Till the green leaves dance again,
  Till the air is sweet with flowers!
Wake the cowslips by the rill,
Wake the yellow daffodil!
                Robin's come!

William W. Caldwell

ROBIN

Sir Robin

Rollicking Robin is here again.
What does he care for the April rain?
Care for it? Glad of it. Doesn't he know
That the April rain carries off the snow,
And coaxes out leaves to shadow his nest,
And washes his pretty red Easter vest,
And makes the juice of the cherry sweet,
For his hungry little robins to eat?

* * * * *

Robin, Sir Robin, gay, red-vested knight,
Now you have come to us, summer's in sight;
You never dream of the wonders you bring,
Visions that follow the flash of your wing;
How all the beautiful By-and-by
Around you and after you seems to fly!
Sing on, or eat on, as pleases your mind,
Well have you earned every morsel you find.

Lucy Larcom

Robin Redbreast

(A True Story)

One bright March day, when angry winds
  Had sobbed themselves to sleep,
And fresh sweet Earth, 'neath melting snow
  Spring's secrets sweet held deep,
We heard a robin's ringing call
  From treetop on the lawn;
He sang, "Cheer-up! Cheer-up! I'm here!
  The gloomy winter's gone!"

As if departing Winter heard—
  Was angered at his words—
He straightway blew a cruel blast
  To harm the "early birds."
The snow fell fast, the winds rode high,
  And ice incased the trees;
No food could Robin Redbreast find;
  We dreaded lest he freeze.

We opened wide the window-sash,
  And on the sill we laid
Some tempting crumbs; down in a trice
  Flew Robin, unafraid.
While raged the storm, each day we placed
  His food—a goodly store;
Ere long he gave a gentle tap
  Upon the pane for more!

Long after Spring had spread her feast
  For him, he came to see
What dainty morsels we reserved
  To tempt enticingly.
He hopped into our welcoming home,
  His store-house—rich, replete—
And, close beside us, sang to us
  His love-song, tender, sweet.

Four happy years, he and his mate
  Raised broods beside our door;
We fed them all, and every Spring
  Our hearts rejoiced once more
To hear his friendly little tap
  Upon our window-pane.
Then one sad year, ill must have come—
  He ne'er returned again.

A. E. B.

The Children In The Wood

He took the children by the hand,
  Tears standing in their eye,
And bade them straightway follow him,
  And look they did not crye;
And two long miles he led them on,
  While they for food complained;
"Staye here," quoth he, "I'll bring you bread,
  When I come back againe."

These prettye babes, with hand in hand
  Went wandering up and downe;
But never more could see the man
  Approaching from the town;
Their prettye lippes with black-berries,
  Were all besmeared and dyed,
And when they sawe the darksome night,
  They sat them downe and cryed.

Thus wandered these poor innocents,
  Till deathe did end their grief;
In one another's arms they dyed,
  As wanting due relief;
No burial this "prettye pair"
  Of any man receives,
Till Robin Redbreast piously
  Did cover them with leaves.

Thomas Percy, 1765

Why The Robin's Breast Was Red

The Saviour, bowed beneath his cross, climbed up the dreary hill,
And from the agonizing wreath ran many a crimson rill;
The cruel Roman thrust him on with unrelenting hand,
Till, staggering slowly, 'mid the crowd, He fell upon the sand.

A little bird that warbled near, that memorable day,
Flitted around and strove to wrench one single thorn away;
The cruel spike impaled his breast,—and thus, 'tis sweetly said,
The Robin has his silver vest incarnadined with red.

Selected from James Ryder Randall
(E. C. Stedman's Anthology)

The Red-Winged Blackbird

The Red-Winged Blackbird

*The Red-winged Blackbird

In meadows where a streamlet flows
  Or sedges rim a pool,
There swings upon a blade of green
  Beside the waters cool,
A bird of black, with "epaulets"
  Of red and gold. With glee
He plays upon his "Magic Flute;"
  "O-o-ka-ree! O-o-ka-ree!"

A. E. B.

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*Note.—The upper figure in the picture is the male bird; the lower, the female.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

The Cowbird

The Cowbird

In pastures where the cattle graze,
Flock birds with very wicked ways.
Their backs and wings are shining black;
Their heads and breasts are brown. They clack
  And gurgle hideously.

A brown-gray female sneaks away,
Her egg in a *small* bird's nest to lay;
When hatched, the young one cheats the brood
Of tiny nestlings of their food,
  Till they starve piteously.

Or possibly, the fledgling bold
Will push them out to die of cold.
Full-grown, to a cowbird flock he'll fly;
Bird villain of the deepest dye,
  He prospers shamelessly.

A. E. B.

COWBIRD

The Phoebe

The Phoebe

When blustering March has gentler grown,
  A mild day surely brings
A little bird of olive brown,
  With dusky head and wings,
And soft white breast. He's journeyed north
  Without his well-loved mate;
Dejectedly upon a twig
  Or fence-post, he'll await
Her coming; then contentedly
  They'll seek some sheltered nook,
Beneath a bridge, perchance, and build
  Above a murmuring brook.
"Phoé-be! Phoé-be!" Hear him now,
From the pussy-willow bough!

A. E. B.

PHOEBE

The Flicker
or
Golden-Winged Woodpecker

The Flicker or Golden-Winged Woodpecker

Gay, golden-shafted flicker is here,
  With his wings all brightly lined;
On his blue-gray head with its long strong bill,
  A crescent of red you'll find;
He wears a brown coat and a black mustache,
  And he shows a patch of white
Above his sharply-pointed tail,
  When he takes his rapid flight.

His breast and back are flecked with black;
  A collar dark he wears.
His feet are strong, and his four toes
  Are so arranged, in pairs,
That he can climb the trunks of trees
  Where his food of grubs is found;
More frequently his sticky tongue
  Seeks ants upon the ground.

Now hear him speak! He says, "Che-ăcḱ!"
  Or calls to lazy boys,
"Oh, *wakė*-up, *wakė*-up, *wakė*-up, you!"
  He'll rouse you with his noise.
And when his heart beats high, he sings,
  "I'm Flick-Flick-Flick-Flick-Flicker!"
Or fast and faster still it rings,
  "O-qui-qui-qui-qui-qui-qui-qui-qui-
                qui-qui-qui-qui- quicker!"

A. E. B.

FLICKER

The Meadowlark
The Mourning Dove

The Meadowlark

When the sweet brown earth is upturned in the spring,
And all the sky is clear,
I make the fields and the heavens ring;
"Spring of the year!"

My coat is brown like my Mother Earth,
My voice is full of cheer;
My heart is glad at the springtime's birth;
"Spring of the year!"

My breast is gold like the sun's warm rays
With a band like a rain-cloud dark;
My stripèd head from the fields I raise;
"I'm Mead-ow- Lark!"

My mate lies low in her nest of grass,
And I love to hover near;
I sing to her heart as the sweet days pass,
"I love you dear!"

MEADOWLARK

And when the nestlings begin to fly,
They follow without a fear;
Two feathers white in my tail they spy;
"Oh I am here!"

When the meadows are yellow with ripened grain,
And the days are crisp and clear,
I share the bounty I've helped to gain;
"The har- vest's here!"

A. E. B.

The Mourning Dove

Seek open woods or tree-girt fields
  Beneath a sky of blue;
A plaintive voice such woodland yields—
  "Coo-coo-a-coo-coo."

You'll rarely glimpse the gray-brown wing
  Or breast of topaz hue,
Or glistening head—a jewelled thing;
  You'll hear, "Coo-coo-a-coo."

"Why grievest thou, O Mourning Dove?
  Is thy sweet mate untrue?"
He only answers—to his love—
  "Coo-coo-I love-you."

By chance you'll find the flat, crude nest,
  Eggs white, or babies two;
'Tis not the young, in voice distressed,
  That cry, "Coo-coo-a-coo!"

Each morn and night, on swiftest wings
  To waters hid from view,
Doves fly; drink deep of crystal springs,
  And murmur, "Coo-a-coo."

A. E. B.

MOURNING DOVE

The Kingfisher

*The Kingfisher

By a wooded stream or a clear cool pond,
  Or the shores of a shining lake,
A watchful sentinel silently stands.
  When the rippling waters break,
And reveal a glistening fin or scale,
  This blue-coat dashes in,
With his watchman's rattle sounding loud;
  He makes a frightful din!

With the sword that he wears in his plumèd cap,
  He smites his writhing prey;
If tiny, he swallows the fish head-first;
  If large, he bears it away
And beats it to death on the bough of a tree;
  Then back to the bank he will go,
Where his children eagerly wait for him,
  In their famous long "King-row."

His rattle he sounds as he nears his home—
  Their baby rattles respond;
To enter, he crowds the one in front
  Till it pushes the others beyond.
Now backward they run through the tunneled clay
  That their parents hollowed out,
Where they quarrel and tease and bite and gorge,
  And pull the fish about.

KINGFISHER

If a blustering storm piles high the waves,
  Or streams are sullied with mud,
Without fish-dinners these children must go,
  Though frogs may be caught near the flood.
For lizards and mollusks the parents then search—
  Grasshoppers and crickets are found;
And they hasten away to southern climes,
  When waters become ice-bound.

A. E. B.

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*NOTE.—Bird in foreground, the male; in background, with chestnut bands, the female.

The Legend of The Kingfisher

Bold Æolus was king of the winds,
  And he dwelt on a wondrous isle;
His palace rose high from a rocky cliff—
  'Twas visible many a mile.

Old Neptune knew when the Wind's sons played,
  And when they quarreled, too;
For when rude Boreas rode from the North,
  He blew and blew and blew!

The gentle Zephyrus sprang from the West;
  From the East young Eurus came,
While Notus hailed from the South—and oft
  They played a riotous game.

Their sister, fair Halcyone,
  Wed Ceyx, a prince, who sailed
On a voyage long, when Æolus
  And Boreas howled and wailed.

His wife knew all the terrors dread
  That rode with a storm at sea;
But Ceyx would pay no heed to her fears,
  And set sail recklessly.

His ship was tossed like a tiny shell
  And swallowed at last by the sea;
As he drowned, he prayed that his body be borne
  To his sweet Halcyone.

Then Morpheus flew on silent wings
  To her couch, at dead of night;
In a dream, he told of her husband's fate,
  And she wakened in a fright.

She sprang from her bed with a piercing shriek
  And speedily sought the shore;
At dawn she beheld his body afloat.
  Above the breakers roar

Was heard her cry of agony;
  'Neath the waves she was lost to view,
To arise again as a marvelous bird
  With a crown and a robe of blue.

Then Jove rebuked old Æolus—
  Forbade the winds to blow
For a fortnight, that Halcyone
  A brooding peace might know.

* * * * * *

And now when come the "Halcyon days,"
  We seek the waters clear,
And watch this king-of-fishers flash—
  'Tis the magic time of the year.

A. E. B.

The Kingfisher

He laughs by the summer stream
Where the lilies nod and dream,
As through the sheen of water cool and clear,
He sees the chub and sunfish cutting sheer.

His are resplendent eyes;
His mien is kingliwise;
And down the May wind rides he like a king,
With more than royal purple on his wing.

His palace is the brake
Where the rushes shine and shake;
His music is the murmur of the stream,
And that leaf-rustle where the lilies dream.

Such life as his would be
A more than heaven to me;
All sun, all bloom, all happy weather,
All joys bound in a sheaf together.

No wonder he laughs so loud!
No wonder he looks so proud!
There are great kings would give their royalty
To have one day of his felicity!

Maurice Thompson

The Red-headed Woodpecker
The Field Sparrow

The Legend of the First Woodpecker

Once on a time, down to the earth,
  The wise "Great Spirit" came;
Disguised as an aged man, he sought
  A wigwam's leaping flame.
"I am faint; pray give me food," he begged;
  And the Indian squaw replied,
"I'll bake you a cake of my golden meal."
  "I will wait," the Spirit sighed.

When the cake was done, it had grown in size;
  "It is far too big," thought she.
Aloud she said, "If you longer wait,
  I will make one presently."
When the second was baked, it, too, had grown—
  A monstrous cake it looked;
" 'Tis more than enough for a feast," she thought;
  She said, "It is not well-cooked."

The third, the smallest of all, became
  By the Spirit's magic spell,
So great that she laid it away with the rest,
  And cried, "I know full well
You deserve no food. Begone, I say!
  In the bark of the forest trees
You can find enough for such as you!"
  Then she dropped upon her knees.

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER

For the Spirit arose, aflame with wrath,
  And he spake to her angrily.
"Thou art selfish and mean, and quite unfit,
  An Indian woman to be.
Go out to the trees and search for *your* food!"
  She felt herself grow small;
Wings grew from her sides, and away she flew,
  With a woodpecker's noisy call.
    "Quirk! Quir-r-k!
    For my food I must work!"

A. E. B.

The Field Sparrow

You are only a voice of the fields, sweet sprite,
  Where we watch for your bright brown head,
For the golden flush o'er your breast of white,
  And your bill of softest red.

When we venture near, you slip away,
  And hide within the brush,
Where joyously you sing all day,
  And at evening's solemn hush.

The summer may wane—elusively
  You may have escaped our view,
But your tender voice, alluringly,
  Has drawn our hearts to you.

"Chee-wee, chee-wee, chee-wee!
Dee-dee-dee, de-de-de-de-dee!"

A. E. B.

FIELD SPARROW

The Field Sparrow

A bubble of music floats
  The slope of the hillside over;
A little wandering sparrow's notes;
  And the bloom of yarrow and clover,
And the smell of sweet-fern and the bayberry leaf,
  On his ripple of song are stealing;
For he is a chartered thief,
  The wealth of the fields revealing.

One syllable, clear and soft
  As a raindrop's silvery patter,
Or a tinkling fairy-bell, heard aloft
  In the midst of the merry chatter
Of robin and linnet and wren and jay,—
  One syllable, oft repeated:
He has but a word to say,
  And of that he will not be cheated.

The singer I have not seen;
  But the song I arise and follow
The brown hills over, the pastures green,
  And into the sunlit hollow,
With a joy that his life to mine has lent.
  I can feel my glad eyes glisten,
Though he hides in his happy tent
  While I stand outside, and listen.

This way would I also sing,
  My dear little hillside neighbor!
A tender carol of peace to bring
  To the sunburnt fields of labor
Is better than making a loud ado;
  Trill on, amid clover and yarrow!
There's a heart-beat echoing you,
  And blessing you, blithe little sparrow!

Lucy Larcom

The Vesper Sparrow
The Chipping Sparrow

The Vesper Sparrow

When the meadows are brown, or flushed with green,
  And the lark's glad note rings clear;
When the field-sparrow's voice like a silver bell
  Chimes a melody sweet to hear;
A small brown bird with bay-capped wings,
  And feathers white in his tail,
Flutters along by a roadside hedge,
  Or alights on a zigzag rail;
And breathes out a song entrancing,
  Of a beauty surpassed by few—
A wistful, plaintive, minor strain—
  "O Sweetheart, I love you!"

When a mist of green o'erspreads the trees,
  And corals and rubies gay
Are hung on the maple and red-bud boughs,
  And the brooks are babbling away;
When the setting sun goes down in a glow
  Of the purest primrose gold,
And the pearly east reflects a flush
  From the glories the west doth hold;
This brown bird then, with a soul in his voice,
  Sings to his mate so true,
The tenderest song of the April choir—
  "O, Sweetheart, I love you!"

A. E. B.

VESPER SPARROW

The Vesper Sparrow

It comes from childhood land,
  Where summer days are long
And summer eves are bland,—
  A lulling good-night song.

Upon a pasture stone,
  Against the fading west,
A small bird sings alone,
  Then dives and finds its nest.

The evening star has heard,
  And flutters into sight;
O childhood's vesper-bird,
  My heart calls back, Good Night.

Edith M. Thomas

The Chipping Sparrow

Some sparrows live in open fields
  Or in hedges' safe retreat;
You dearly love the haunts of men—
  The garden, orchard, street;
You smallest of all sparrow-folk,
  Your sweet, confiding way
Endears you to your human friends;
  We love your homely lay:
O Chip-py, Chip-py, Chip-py, Chip-py,
    Chip-py, Chip-py, Chip-py!

You wear a dark brown, stripèd coat,
  A vest of grayish white;
A reddish cap, with line of gray
  Above your eyes so bright,
And streak of black behind each eye
  Like spectacles' neat bow;
You don a tiny dull-brown cap
  When to the South you go:
O Chippy, Chippy, Chippy, Chippy,
    Chippy, Chippy, Chippy!

Your tiny nest of rootlets fine
  With horsehair deftly lined,
And mottled blue-green eggs within,
  Delightedly we'll find
In hanging vines or bushes low,
  That grow beside our door;
We welcome you on April days
  As we have done of yore:
O Chippy, Chippy, Chippy, Chippy,
    Chippy, Chippy, Chippy!

A. E. B.

CHIPPING SPARROW

The Ground Robin
Chewink, Towhee
or Charee

The Ground Robin, Chewink, Towhee or Charee

I'm a puzzling bird; 'tis hard to tell
Just who I am, till you know me well.

"The oriole's here"! the children say.
He does not arrive till the first of May.

I come in April, when days are cold,
And stay until forests are red and gold.

I welcome the early blossoms fair,
And linger till asters are shining there.

I'm not Robin Redbreast, as one might think,—
Though I'm called "Ground Robin", or just
"Chewink",—

For I'm rufous and black, with a breast of white,
And two ashen tail-feathers showing in flight.

When I speak to my mate, I say, "Towhee?"
Or call her in French, "Chérie? Chérie?"

To the lovers of spring who seek for a sign,
I chant this message, line by line:

"Chip-chur! Pussy-Pussy-Willow!
Chip-chur! Come-and-get-your-fill-oh!"

A. E. B.

TOWHEE

PART THREE

The Later Spring Birds

The Migration of Birds

The night comes on apace. The rain,
The warm, still rain, falls soft again.
I feel the breath of growing things;
I seem to hear the whir of wings
Of countless birds, just marshaling
Their ranks for long, long journeying.

* * * * *

The songsters bold that fly by day,
Near gleaming waters wing their way.
Their timid fellows shun the light—
God guides them through the dusky night.
But every heart holds home-love strong
Enough to brave the distance long.

A. E. B.

The Tree Swallow

First of the swallow host they speed
  To the North, by rivers and silver shores;
Lustrous green like a marsh's reed,
  Fleecy white like the cloud that soars
Over these shimmering, flashing things
  That sweetly warble in ecstasy,
And circle about with their powerful wings
  Till they seek their nests in a hollow tree.

A. E. B.

TREE SWALLOW

Little birds sit on the telegraph-wires,
  And chitter, and flitter, and fold their wings;
Maybe they think that for them and their sires
  Stretched always, on purpose, those wonderful strings:
And perhaps the Thought that the world inspires
  Did plan for the birds, among other things.

Little birds sit on the slender lines,
  And the news of the world runs under their feet:
How value rises, and how declines,
  How kings with their armies in battle meet;
And all the while, 'mid the soundless signs,
  They chirp their small gossipings, foolish-sweet.

Mrs. A. D. T. Whitney

The Barn Swallow

And after April, when May follows,
And the white-throat builds, and all the swallows!

Browning

We come from the land of the South so gay,
  That is decked with flowers when the North is drear;
We hear the alluring voice of May,
  As she whispers softly, "Spring is here!"

With a flutter of joy, for the journey long
  Our wings we spread with a tireless flight,
Beguiling the hours with a twittering song,
  As we skim the pools near the iris bright.

Our steel-blue backs like the waters shine,
  Our breasts glow warm like the red-brown clay;
We are blue birds fleet of the blossom-time,
  Winging and singing the days away.

The garlanded trees in the orchard fair,
  And lilac-plumes in the garden, fling
Their perfume out on the rain-washed air—
  Of no lovelier vision could swallows sing!

A. E. B.

BARN SWALLOW

How the Swallow's Tail Became Forked

(A Legend)

"Great Spirit" summoned to a grove
  Bird, beast and creeping thing,
That they might ask what boon they would,
  Or any grievance bring.

Fleet-wingèd birds and insects came:
  The swallow, swift and owl,
Mosquito, hornet, bee and wasp,
  And later, fluttering fowl.

Next sped the squirrel, rabbit, fox,
  Swift-footed stag and doe;
Then bear and wolf; and last of all,
  The tortoise, ever slow.

Each told how others preyed on him,
  Each asked some boon conferred;
Then Man appeared, their common foe,
  And none dared speak a word.

Man said, "Great Spirit, only birds
  My true friends seem to be;
The others bite or scratch or sting—
  The snake most dangerously."

Bee buzzed, Owl hooted, Serpent hissed,
  And Squirrel chattered loud;
Wolf howled, Bear growled. Great Spirit's voice
  Hushed the rebellious crowd.

"Man, you are right; you are attacked
  By creatures, great and small.
Mosquito, sheathe your sting, and fly
  To every beast; ask all

How they can best make friends with Man."
  Away Mosquito flew
And stung them all except the snake—
  A spiteful thing to do.

Then Swallow, darting swiftly down,
  Bit out Mosquito's tongue,
And since that day he cannot speak—
  "Bz-bz—bz-bz"—he's sung.

The treacherous serpent glided forth
  The friend of Man to slay;
He struck and bit—but Swallow flew
  Too fast to be his prey.

Old Snake's curved, venomed mouth tore part
  Of Swallow's tail away;
Two sharply-pointed forks remained—
  You'll find them there today.

A. E. B.

The Purple Martin
The Chimney Swift

The Purple Martin

Bird beloved by keen-eyed Indians,
  "Bird that never rests;"
Cherished, too, by southern negroes,
  Who provide them nests,
Knowing thus their tiny chickens
  Safe from hawks will be;
Valued, too, by northern farmers,
  As crows' enemy.

Martins seek the sheltering houses,
  Placed where insects hum
Midst a tangle of sweet blossoms;
  But if sparrows come,
The noisy, selfish, rude intruders
  For those homes will fight,
Till the vanquished purple martins
  Take a speedy flight.

A. E. B.

PURPLE MARTIN

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
By his loved mansionery that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendant bed.

Shakespeare: "Macbeth"

The Chimney Swift

Some soft spring day, athwart the sky,
A bird like a "bow-and-arrow" speeds by
From tropic lands in the distant South.
'Tis the twittering Swift, that with open mouth
And unwearying wings seeks insect prey;
And countless others arrive straightway.

Such flapping and whirling and wheeling about,
Till the sun goes down, and the stars come out!
Then hollow trees they speedily seek,
Or chimneys unused; with feet tiny and weak
And strong pointed tails, to the walls they cling.
A flock of a thousand the night will bring!

Their nests are pockets against the wall,
Built deftly of sticks, which rarely fall
Because they are fastened too snug with a glue
From the mouths of these birds of sable hue.
The eggs of the swifts are of purest white,
Like others in nests that are hidden from sight.

A. E. B.

CHIMNEY SWIFT

The Nighthawk

The Nighthawk

In the far-off land of China,
  One beholds a curious sight.
On the shoes of little children,
  Eyes are fashioned, wondrous bright,
So the small feet shall not stumble,
  But shall see the way to go;
And on boats' prows eyes are painted
  That shall guide them, safe and slow.

There are birds that fly at twilight,
  With a call incessant, loud,
Throats white-banded, mouths wide open—
  Busy, dusky, night-hawk crowd.
As they circle in the darkness,
  Sharpest eyesight theirs must be;
Bright eyes on their wings seem painted
  That shall guide them carefully.

Gracefully they fly o'er housetops;
  Then with wings half-closed, dive down,
Till you fear they'll dash to pieces
  'Gainst the chimneys of the town.
They are slumbering at midnight,
  But at dawn may fly about;
Often resting till the sun sets,
  When their insect prey comes out.

A. E. B.

NIGHT HAWK

The Whip-poor-will

The Whip-poor-will

When wingèd creatures for the night
  Are safely hid away,
And even swifts and nighthawks bold
  Have ceased to search for prey;
When owls, with round, wide-open eyes
  Begin to prowl about—
Mysteriously, with noiseless wings,
  A gentle bird comes out
Of densest thickets, where he hides—
  And rarely is he found;
He seems a lichen on a log,
  A dead leaf on the ground.

He opens wide his monstrous mouth,
  All fringed with bristling hair,
Entangling gnats and soft-winged moths
  In the net-like meshes there.
While sleeps the world, these shadow birds
  For long hours sweep the sky,
And rid the land of countless pests
  Their large bright eyes espy.
At times they pause, and weirdly call
  When all around is still—
And best when moonlight floods the earth—
  "Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will!"

A. E. B.

WHIP-POOR-WILL

The House Wren
The Oven-Bird

The House Wren

When apple-blooms are hanging
  On the boughs like rosy shells,
And the warm, soft rain is bringing
  All that budding May foretells,

If you waken in the morning
  When the birds their matins sing,
Loudest, clearest, fullest, gladdest
  Of the voices of the spring

Burst the wren's sweet notes of rapture;
  And you wonder that so strong
Is the throat of such small creature,
  To pour forth so great a song.

* * * * *

You may find him in the orchard,
  In a suit, black-checked and brown,
With a white vest. Watch his restless
  Tiny tail go up and down!

When the honeymoon is over,
  Little John and Jenny Wren
Choose a nesting-spot unusual,
  Near the dwelling-place of men:

Flower-pot, can or hanging milk-pail,
  Worn-out shoe, or hat of straw,
Pocket of a coat discarded,—
  Queerest home you ever saw.

HOUSE WREN

Tiny, hungry, clamoring babies
  Make their busy parents work
Bringing choicest, tenderest morsels;
  Faithful Jenny does not shirk.

But her irritable temper
  Makes her quarrel with her spouse;
And she's not a pleasant neighbor,—
  Valiantly she guards her house.

She may drive away intruders,
  Placing sticks across her door
If the entrance is too spacious;
  From her throat loud scoldings pour.

For her skill, and her devotion
  To her growing family,
We admire her; and without her
  Quite bereft our spring would be.

A. E. B.

*The Oven-Bird or Gold-Crowned Thrush

Where the Veery breathes through organ-pipes
  And the Wood Thrush plays a flute,
Where Hermit Thrushes' psalms intoned
  At sunset, hold us mute;
Where the Red-eyed Vireo preaches long,
  As though, like Pharisee,
For his "much-speaking" he'll be heard,—
  Exhorting fervently,—
Another dweller of the woods
  Pleads like the tireless preacher,
Imploring,—"Teacher—*Teacher*—
  TEACHER—TEACHER—TEACHER!"

He, gold-crowned thrush, eludes our gaze;
  But wheresoe'er we stray,
We hear his clear crescendo phrase
  Now near, now far away.
These woodland warblers! Hear them say,
  "Search all the forest over,
For it will prove a treasure-house,
  With riches to discover
Which last as long as life itself!
  This place of mystery
Makes wondrous revelations
  Of God's power and majesty."

A. E. B.

OVEN-BIRD

The Oven-Bird

In the hollows of the mountains,
In the valleys spreading from them,
Stand the rustling broad-leaved forests,
Trees whose leaves are shed in autumn.

Underneath them lie the leaf beds
Resting one upon another
Laid there yearly by the storm winds;
Pressed and smoothed by winter snow-drifts.

In the days of spring migrations,
Days when warbler hosts move northward,
To the forests, to the leaf-beds,
Comes the tiny oven-builder.

Daintily the leaves he tiptoes;
Underneath them builds his oven,
Arched and framed with last year's oak-leaves,
Roofed and walled against the raindrops.

Hour by hour his voice he raises,
Mingling with the red-eye's snatches,
Answering to the hermit's anthem;
Rising—falling, like a wind breath.

Strange, ventriloquous his music,
Far away when close beside one;
Near at hand when seeming distant;
Weird—his plaintive accrescendo.

Teach us! Teach us! in his asking,
Uttered to the Omnipresent:
Teach us! teach us! comes responsive
From the solemn listening forest.

When the whip-poor-will is clucking,
When the bats unfurl their canvas,
When dim twilight rules the forest,
Soaring towards the high stars' radiance
Far above the highest treetop
Singing goes this sweet Accentor.

Noontide never sees this soaring,
Midday never hears this music,
Only at the hour of slumber,
Only once, as day is dying,
When the perils and the sorrows,
When the blessings and the raptures,
One and all have joined the finished,
Does this sweet-toned forest singer
Urge his wings towards endless ether,
Hover high a single moment
Pouring out his spirit's gladness
Toward the Source of life and being.

Frank Bolles

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*NOTE.—In Chapman's "Birds of Eastern North America," the ovenbird's song is rendered, "Teacher, *teacher*, TEACHER, TEACHER, TEACHER," according to John Burroughs written description of it.

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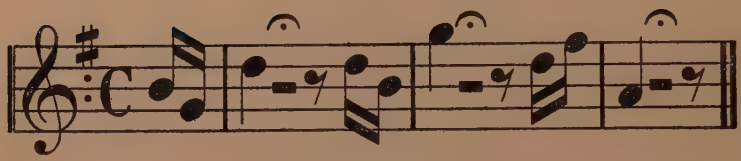
The Wood Thrush

The Brown Thrasher

The Catbird

The Mockingbird

The Wood Thrush



Come to me! Oh, be free! Come to me!

We heed thy call, O bird of the wood,
  As swift as our feet can fly
To the forest dim, holding infinite good
  For the soul and the ear and the eye.

Thou art worthy to dwell in such sacred spot,
  Bird brown as the last year's leaves,
With thy lustrous eyes and thy soft, flecked breast,
  And a song that enchantment weaves.

Is thy hymn of praise to the God of the Spring?
  And dost thou, too, receive
A strength renewed from the Giver of Life?
  Our reverent hearts so believe.

A. E. B.

WOOD THRUSH

At even
Like liquid pearls fresh showered from heaven,
The high notes of the lone wood-thrush
Fall on the forest's holy hush.

John Townsend Trowbridge

At the bent spray's edge,—
That's the wise thrush.

Browning

This is a spray the Bird clung to,
  Making it blossom with pleasure,
Ere the high treetop she clung to,
  Fit for her nest and her treasure.
  Oh, what a hope beyond measure
Was the poor spray's, which the flying feet hung to—
So to be singled out, built in, and sung to!

Browning: From "Misconceptions"

The Brown Thrasher

He sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
That first fine careless rapture!

Browning

Darting about in the thickets,
  His red-brown coat to veil,
Foraging there amongst dead leaves,
  Thrashing his long brown tail;
Perching aloft in the treetops,
  Where all may hear and see,
Carols the bright Brown Thrasher,
  Long and melodiously.

"Listen, O listen!" he's saying;
  "Glisten, O glisten, you Brook!
The sweet warm showers have beguiled the flowers;
  O look! dear children, look!
The golden sun is shining,
  The earth is in gay array;
The world is rife with a wealth of life!
  'Tis May, fair winsome May!"

A. E. B.

BROWN THRASHER

The Throstle

(The song of the English throstle or thrush resembles that of our thrasher).

"Summer is coming, summer is coming.
  I know it, I know it, I know it.
Light again, leaf again, life again, love again!"
  Yes, my wild little Poet.

Sing the new year in under the blue.
  Last year you sang it as gladly.
"New, new, new, new!" Is it then so new
  That you should carol so madly?

"Love again, song again, nest again, young again,"
  Never a prophet so crazy!
And hardly a daisy as yet, little friend,
  See, there is hardly a daisy.

"Here again, here, here, here, happy year!"
  O warble unchidden, unbidden!
Summer is coming, is coming, my dear,
  And all the winters are hidden.

Tennyson

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
He, too, is no mean preacher:
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your Teacher.

Wordsworth

The Catbird

Gay and restless are the catbirds,
  Moving tails incessantly;
Spreading them like vainest peacocks,
  Preening feathers jauntily.

Now they crouch like Maltese kittens—
  Just two soft gray fluffy balls;
Next they lengthen their lithe bodies,
  Flapping wings, with catlike calls.

Loving, tender, anxious Mother
  Guards her rough scrap-basket nest;
Kindly, busy, helpful Father
  Feeds young orphaned birds distressed.

He defends the nests of others,
  Likes to build his own near Man;
Knows he's earned his share of cherries,
  Helps himself whene'er he can.

Intelligent, a clever mimic,
  Lovable and friendly bird;
When he sings, more skilled performer
  In our North is rarely heard.

A. E. B.

CATBIRD

The Catbird

He sits on a branch of yon blossoming brush
This madcap cousin of robin and thrush,
And sings without ceasing the whole morning long;
Now wild, now tender, the wayward song
That flows from his soft, gray, fluttering throat;
But often he stops in his sweetest note,
And, shaking a flower from the blossoming bough,
Drawls out, "Mi-eu, mi-ow!"

Dear merry mocker, your mimic art
Makes drowsy Grimalkin awake with a start,
And peer all around with a puzzled air,—
For who would suppose that one would dare
To mimic the voice of a mortal foe!
You're safe on the bough, as well you know;
And if ever a bird could laugh, 'tis you,
Drawling, "Mi-ow, mi-eu!"

Edith M. Thomas

The Mockingbird

A singer, one hour, with yearning heart,
Who knows all the nicer ways of his art,
With a soul so full of poesy
That we listen to him in ecstasy.
But hark! what is that? Distinctly we hear
The pop of a cork, a whistle clear,
A call to a dog, a whip-poor-will's cry,
A phoebe's hoarse note. Against the blue sky,
The same gray-coated, white-vested bird
Is uttering all the sounds we have heard.

The poets sing oft of his exquisite lays,
But never reveal the pranks he plays;
How he steals soft cotton to line his nest,
And to animals proves a troublesome pest.
On the back of a yelping dog he's been spied,
Pulling out hairs while taking a ride;
The cats, forgetting that he is their prey,
As soon as they see him, slink away.
O clever bird, we know you well,
Though away "down South" and "out West" you dwell.

A. E. B.

MOCKINGBIRD

The Yellow-Billed Cuckoo
The Humming-Bird

The Yellow-Billed Cuckoo

You slender, shy and dovelike bird,
  All white and brownish gray,
With rufous wings, black, spotted tail,
  Bill yellow half the way,
You're rarely seen, not often heard;
  Your "Kuk-kuk-kuk-kuk-coo",
Brings eager eyes to woodland glades
  To catch a glimpse of you.

A. E. B.

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO

To The Cuckoo

O blithe New-comer! I have heard,
  I hear thee and rejoice.
O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,
  Or but a wandering Voice?

* * * * *

Thrice welcome, darling of the Spring!
  Even yet thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing,
  A voice, a mystery.

* * * * *

To seek thee did I often rove
  Through woods and on the green;
And thou wert still a hope, a love;
  Still longed for, never seen.

Wordsworth

The Legend of the First Humming-Bird

Once on a time, two Indians sped
  From a forest at dead of night,
When they came on a fiery mound, cone-shaped,—
  A frightful, awesome sight.

Against the sky they saw it glow
  With a flickering, lurid gleam;
Great yawning cracks in its riven side
  Showed fire in every seam.

Smoke floated away from its flaming top,
  Hid stars and darkened the sky;
"Great Spirit's wigwam it must be,"
  They said with a frightened cry.

"How angry he must be with our tribe!"
  They thought, and could not sleep;
When morning dawned, their fears were soothed,
  For 'twas only a mountain steep.

Its glow had faded in broad daylight,
  And they climbed to its summit high;
In a hollow lay Fire Spirit's home,
  But it did not terrify.

They hastened down to tell the tribe
  Their wigwams thither to bear,
For the flames would light their winter fires,
  And cold could be conquered there.

RUBY-THROATED HUMMING-BIRD

For many a month the Indians dwelt
  At the foot of the mountain high,
And the children were taught to call it friend;
  They laughed when it brightened the sky.

One night when the people were all asleep,
  The flames had a frolic gay;
They leaped and pranced like warriors bold
  In a war-dance or a fray.

They flung great rocks up toward the sky,
  Then down the slopes they ran;
They would not heed Fire Spirit's call
  As their mad race began.

They leaped on trees, devoured the leaves,
  Destroyed the flowers fair;
Drove birds away from their hidden nests,
  And every beast from its lair.

They poured down melted rock, red-hot,
  In their frantic, furious play;
And frightened, the saddened Indians fled
  When their homes were swept away.

At last Great Spirit's voice rang out;
  "These wicked deeds must cease!
You all must die, that the children of men
  And the beasts may live in peace."

Fire Spirit begged her Master great
  To remember good deeds performed,—
How frost and cold she had driven away,
  How the people she oft had warmed.

Great Spirit heeded her not, but struck
  The mountain a heavy blow
With his powerful club; and cold and dead
  Her fires began to grow.

One beautiful little flame was left.
  It promised that it would fly
Far, far away from the mountain-top,
  If only it need not die.

Great Spirit gave it a gentle touch,
  And it took the form of a bird;
From its sides grew delicate, filmy wings
  That buzzed and hummed and whirred.

A red flame burned at its tiny throat—
  On its back flashed burnished gold;
Then forth it sped as a humming-bird,
  And this is the tale I was told.

A. E. B.

The Humming-Bird

Dancer of air,
Flashing thy flight across the noontide hour,
To pierce and pass ere it is full aware
Each wondering flower!

Jewelled coryphée,
With quivering wings like shielding gauze outspread,
And measure like a gleaming shuttle's play
With unseen thread!

The phlox, milk-white,
Sways to thy whirling; stirs each warm rose breast;
But not for these thy palpitant delight,
Thy rhythmic quest;

Swift weaves thy maze
Where flaunts the trumpet-vine its scarlet pride,
Where softer fire, behind its chaliced blaze,
Doth fluttering hide.

The grave thrush sings
His love-call, and the nightingale's romance
Throbs through the twilight; thou hast but thy wings,
Thy sun-thrilled dance.

Yet doth love's glow
Burn in the ruby of thy restless throat,
Guiding thy voiceless ecstasy to know
The richest note

Of brooding thrush!
Now for thy joy the emptied air doth long;
Thine is the nested silence, and the hush
That needs no song.

Ednah Proctor Clarke

The Indigo-Bird
or
Indigo Bunting

The Indigo-Bird or Indigo Bunting

His plumage is bright as the sapphire blue
  That dwells in the depths of Italy's sea,
And blends with the hidden emerald hue
  To glint and glisten shimmeringly.
His song bursts forth like the brooklet's rush,
  Or murmuring waves' sweet melody;
And even when falls midsummer's hush,
  The indigo-bird sings rapturously:
"See, see, sweet, sweet, chur, chur;
 Wish, wish, wish, — chur, chur, chur."

A. E. B.

INDIGO-BIRD

The Baltimore Oriole
and
The Orchard Oriole

The Baltimore Oriole

W W
h h
e e
w! w! A whistle clear
As a silver flute sounds sweet;
And a lively chatter falls on the ear,
From the oriole, gay and fleet.

A flash of flame from a swaying bough
Leaps from the trees to the skies;
Like a meteor swift, the "fire-bird" now
Leaves a glowing trail as he flies.

This restless, eager, burning bird
Never his light doth hide;
Where his beauty is seen, or his song is heard,
Joy on his wings doth ride.

A. E. B.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE

The Oriole

Hush! 'tis he!
My Oriole, my glance of summer fire
Is come at last; * * * *
* * * * * *
Heave, ho! Heave, ho! he whistles * *
* * Once more, now! and a flash
Lightens across the sunlight to the elm
Where his mate dangles at her cup of felt.

Lowell

To An Oriole

How falls it, Oriole, thou hast come to fly
In tropic splendor through our northern sky?

At some glad moment was it Nature's choice
To dower a scrap of sunset with a voice?

Or did an orange tulip, flaked with black,
In some forgotten garden, ages back,

Yearning toward Heaven until its wish was heard,
Desire unspeakably to be a bird?

Edgar Fawcett

*The Orchard Oriole

More modest in dress is this chestnut bird,
  With his glossy black shoulders and head,
Than his flaming cousin in orange and jet;
  And gentler, too, is he bred.

His beauty he hides amidst blossoming boughs,
  Or the leaves of the maple-tree;
But his voice like a dryad's in the wood,
  Makes a rich, deep rhapsody.

A. E. B.

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*NOTE.—The upper figure in the picture is the adult male; the middle figure, the young male; the lower figure, the female.

Audubon Leaflet.

ORCHARD ORIOLE

The Scarlet Tanager

The Scarlet Tanager

Why seems the world so fair to-day?
  I sought the magic wood,
Where stately trees in fresh array
  And silent beauty stood.

And lo! within a dim, green bower
  A brilliant blossom hung.
But, suddenly, my scarlet flower
  Jet wings to the breezes flung!

To his olive mate he called "Chip-chur!"
  And he sang to her, hidden away,
The robin-like song of the tanager,
  A rhythmical roundelay.

A. E. B.

SCARLET TANAGER

The Rose-Breasted Grosbeak

The Rose-Breasted Grosbeak

I'm a dusky bird with the breast of a rose,
And I come when the pale wake-robin blows.

I've a joyous song like the robin's note,
Mellow and rich, from my throbbing throat.

I am one of the songsters that sing at night,
When the stars shine clear or the moon is bright.

A. E. B.

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK

The Bobolink
The Goldfinch
The Yellow Warbler
The Maryland Yellow-Throat

The Red-Eyed Vireo
The Wood Pewee
The Kingbird

The Bobolink

No poet can sing as he would of you!
No trained musician, with hearing true,
Can catch each wonderful liquid note
That bubbles and gurgles and wells from your throat.
He can listen with soul enthralled, and yield
To the spell of the roadside or the field
Where you dart about, and perch and swing
On grass or stalk. With abandon you wing
Over the meadows with showers impearled,
Scattering joy abroad in the world.
Flitting, alighting, you sing all day
Till the golden west grows softest gray.

A. E. B.

BOBOLINK

*Robert of Lincoln

Merrily swinging on brier and weed,
  Near to the nest of his little dame,
Over the mountain-side or mead,
  Robert of Lincoln is telling his name:
        Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
        Spink, spank, spink;
Snug and safe is that nest of ours,
Hidden among the summer flowers.
        Chee, chee, chee.

Robert of Lincoln is gayly drest,
  Wearing a bright black wedding-coat;
White are his shoulders and white his crest.
  Hear him call in his merry note:
        Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
        Spink, spank, spink;
Look, what a nice new coat is mine,
Sure there was never a bird so fine.
        Chee, chee, chee.

Robert of Lincoln's Quaker wife,
  Pretty and quiet, with plain brown wings,
Passing at home a patient life,
  Broods in the grass while her husband sings:
        Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
        Spink, spank, spink;
Brood, kind creature; you need not fear
Thieves and robbers while I am here.
        Chee, chee, chee.

Modest and shy as a nun is she;
One weak chirp is her only note.
Braggart and prince of braggarts is he,
Pouring boasts from his little throat:
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
Never was I afraid of man;
Catch me, cowardly knaves, if you can!
Chee, chee, chee.

Six white eggs on a bed of hay,
Flecked with purple, a pretty sight!
There as the mother sits all day,
Robert is singing with all his might:
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
Nice good wife that never goes out,
Keeping house while I frolic about.
Chee, chee, chee.

Soon as the little ones chip the shell,
Six wide mouths are open for food;
Robert of Lincoln bestirs him well,
Gathering seed for the hungry brood.
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
This new life is likely to be
Hard for a gay young fellow like me.
Chee, chee, chee.

Robert of Lincoln at length is made
  Sober with work, and silent with care,
Off is his holiday garment laid,
  Half forgotten that merry air:
    Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
    Spink, spank, spink;
Nobody knows but my mate and I
Where our nest and our nestlings lie.
    Chee, chee, chee.

Summer wanes; the children are grown;
  Fun and frolic no more he knows;
Robert of Lincoln's a humdrum crone;
  Off he flies, and we sing as he goes:
    Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
    Spink, spank, spink;
When you can pipe that merry old strain,
Robert of Lincoln, come back again.
    Chee, chee, chee.

William Cullen Bryant

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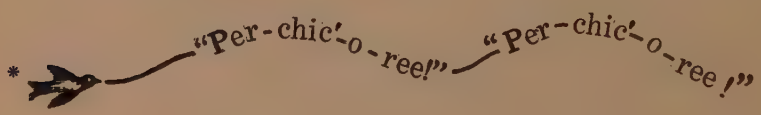
The Goldfinch

This child of Apollo has wings of night,
But a nature as glad as the sun's rays bright.

His musical voice is heard at his play,
As he merrily dances his days away.

He worships the Muse, Terpsichore;
And he sings, as he leaps,



A. E. B.

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*Note.—Call given thus in Mr. Frank Chapman's "Birds of Eastern North America." Used by permission of D. Appleton & Co. Copyright, 1903.

GOLDFINCH

The Goldfinch

Sometimes goldfinches one by one will drop
From low-hung branches; little space they stop
And sip and twitter, and their feathers sleek,
Then off at once, as in a wanton freak;
Or perhaps to show their black and golden wings,
Pausing upon their yellow flutterings.

Keats

The Yellow Warbler

"O, che-che-che-che-che-a-wee?"
In treetops winging rapidly,
The Summer Yellow-Bird you'll see.
He wears no tiny cap of black;
His wings and tail are green. He's back
In blossom-time when insects breed;
He cannot live on hardy seed
Like merry Goldfinch. Shy is he;
And sweetly from the apple-tree,
Sings: "Che - che - che - che - che - a-wee?"

A. E. B.

YELLOW WARBLER

O joy of life, O joy of love!
When cloudless skies are blue above,
In starry spring!
When happy warblers on the wing
Do mating build their nests and sing.
O joy of life!

Stuart Sterne

The Maryland Yellow-Throat

A host of warblers northward come in May,
And linger with us only one brief day;
You, Yellow-throated Warbler, love to stay.

We glimpse your dainty coat of olive green,
Your breast and throat of shimmering yellow sheen
And mask of black, where ferns and bushes lean

O'er sparkling streamlets, rimmed with many a reed,
And hung with brilliant golden jewel-weed.
Midst feathery spikes of meadow-sweet you speed.

Your brooding mate rocks gently to and fro,
And listens, while the summer breezes blow,
To your glad "Witch-i-teé-o! Witch-i-teé-o!"

A. E. B.

MARYLAND YELLOW-THROAT

*The Maryland Yellow-Throat

While May bedecks the naked trees
With tassels and embroideries,
And many blue-eyed violets beam
Along the edges of the stream,
I hear a voice that seems to say,
Now near at hand, now far away,
"Witchery—witchery—witchery."

An incantation so serene,
So innocent, befits the scene:
There's magic in that small bird's note—
See, there he flits—the Yellow-throat;
A living sunbeam, tipped with wings,
A spark of light that shines and sings
"Witchery—witchery—witchery."

Henry van Dyke

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*NOTE.—Reprinted by permission of Charles Scribners' Sons.

*The Red-Eyed Vireo

Do you hear me? Don't you know
I'm the Red-eyed Vireo?
After lovely blossoming May
Entices me, the livelong day—
Even when the August noon
Silences the bards of June—
My incessant voice is heard,
Till I'm called "The Preacher-bird."

I've a gray head, eyebrows light,
A green robe over vestments white.
From roadside pulpits, forest aisles,
I preach against all worldly wiles.
Do you hear me? Don't you know
To forest-temples you must go?
You will love them; there the voice
Of our God bids you rejoice.

Do you hear it? Will you heed it?
Every human soul doth need it.

A. E. B.

RED-EYED VIREO

*NOTE.—Wilson Flagg's description of the Red-eye exactly reflects the character of the bird and its song: "The Preacher is more generally known by his note, because he is incessant in his song. . . . His style of preaching is not declamation. Though constantly talking, he takes the part of a deliberative orator. . . . with a pause between each sentence. 'You see it—you know it—do you hear me?—do you believe it?' All these strains are delivered with a rising inflection at the close, and with a pause, as if waiting for an answer."

From Chapman's "Birds of Eastern North America." (Used by permission of D. Appleton & Co. Copyright, 1903.)

The Wood Pewee

In old deserted orchards,
  A riot of neglect,
In solitudes of arching woods,
  By streamlets which reflect
Long overhanging branches
  With sunshine filtering through,
A plaintive, tender, wistful note
  May flutter down to you.
Perchance upon some leafless bough
  Near a woodland path, you'll see
A tiny bird of olive brown,
  The gentle wood pewee.

Such pathos in his long-drawn note,
  You feel impelled to wait
To comfort him; and if you call,
  He'll answer you. His mate
Sits on her lichen-covered nest,—
  Most exquisite,—while near
He hovers, and he breathes to her,
  "Pe-wee! Pe-wee! Here!"
Now far away his voice is heard,—
  From sadness never free;
As from an over-burdened heart
  He murmurs, "Pee-a-wee."

A. E. B.

WOOD PEWEE

The Pewee

I . . . sat me down
Beside the brook, irresolute,
And watched a little bird in suit
Of sober olive, soft and brown,
Perched in the maple branches, mute:
With greenish gold its vest was fringed,
Its tiny cap was ebon-tinged,
With ivory pale its wings were barred,
And its dark eyes were tender-starred.
"Dear bird," I said, "what is thy name?"
And thrice the mournful answer came,
So faint and far, and yet so near,—
"Pe-wee! pe-wee! peer!"

John Townsend Trowbridge

The Kingbird

I'm a king, though my gold crown hides in black,
  And my robe is a sober gray;
But my fan-shaped train, with its band of white,
And my shining tunic, like ermine bright,
  Are truly a king's array.

I've the valiant heart of a mighty king
  Who knows neither failure nor fear;
When pillaging hawks attack my nest,
I fly at their eyes till they cease their quest;
  I am even the eagle's peer.

My little feathered friends I shield
  From the thieving crow and jay;
And when I approach a swarm of bees,
'Tis the lazy, useless drones I seize;
  I rule in a royal way.

I'll whisper a secret! Keep it safe!
  Though I fight with my great foes well,
When a tiny humming-bird hovers near by,
I spread my wings, and away I fly!
  Obey the king! Don't tell!

A. E. B.

KINGBIRD

The Sandpiper

The Sandpiper

By a tiny pool or a silvery stream;
  Beside the reed-rimmed shore
Of a crystal lake, or on a beach
  Where crested billows roar,
We may watch a flock of gray-brown birds,
  With breasts like snowy foam,
That alight and bow and bob and tip.
  While over the sands we roam,
The fragrant, dank, salt-laden air
  With their plaintive tones rings sweet;
As the surf rolls in, we hear them cry,
  "Peet-weet! Wet-feet! Wet-feet!"

A. E. B.

SANDPIPER

The Sandpiper

Across the narrow beach we flit,
  One little sandpiper and I,
And fast I gather, bit by bit,
  The scattered driftwood bleached and dry.
The wild waves reach their hands for it,
  The wild wind raves, the tide runs high,
As up and down the beach we flit,—
  One little sandpiper and I.

Above our heads the sullen clouds
  Scud black and swift across the sky;
Like silent ghosts in misty shrouds
  Stand out the white lighthouses high.
Almost as far as eye can reach
  I see the close-reefed vessels fly,
As fast we flit along the beach,—
  One little sandpiper and I.

I watch him as he skims along,
  Uttering his sweet and mournful cry;
He starts not at my fitful song,
  Or flash of fluttering drapery.
He has no thought of any wrong;
  He scans me with a fearless eye:
Staunch friends are we, well tried and strong,
  The little sandpiper and I.

Comrade, where wilt thou be to-night
  When the loosed storm breaks furiously?
My driftwood-fire will burn so bright!
  To what warm shelter canst thou fly?
I do not fear for thee, though wroth
  The tempest rushes through the sky;
For are we not God's children both,
  Thou, little sandpiper, and I?

Celia Thaxter

PART FOUR

Nesting-Time

Birds' Occupations

This world is full of busy folk:
  Of workers, great and small,
From Man and beast to fleet-winged birds
  And tiny things that crawl.

All labor hard their food to find,—
  To build their houses, too;
The birds have occupations—like
  The tasks men have to do.

The robin is a potter,
  And makes a cup of clay;
Within, without, he plasters it
  With softest grass or hay.

Neat little mattress-makers
  The chipping sparrows are;
Their children lie on beds of hair,
  The neatest ones by far.

The vireos make baskets,
  Just large enough to hold
Their darling little babies,
  Away from harm and cold.

The kingbirds and the catbirds
  Scrap-baskets like to make;
Newspaper bits and letters old
  Occasionally they take.

The phoebes build 'neath bridges
  Or under sheltering eaves;
A moss-filled hanging-basket
  The pure white eggs receives.

The humming-bird and wood pewee
  Make cups with lichens decked;
Bold Rubythroat avoids his home—
  Perhaps he'd be henpecked!

The woodpeckers are carpenters;
  They hammer on a tree,
And with their strong bills bore deep holes;
  The chips fly steadily.

The kingfishers build tunnels;
  Their children, in a row,
Run forward and run backward
  As fast as they can go.

The mourning doves build platforms
  From which they "bill and coo;"
As orators they do not shine,—
  Poor singers are they, too.

Flamingoes build tall chimneys
  On which their nests they place;
Their long slim legs are folded up
  Like knife-blades in a case.

The oven-birds are bakers,
  And in their ovens warm
The tiny little babies
  Are sheltered from the storm.

The shrike's a naughty butcher;
  He catches little mice,—
Impales them on a thorn to die,
  Then eats them in a trice.

The partridge is a drummer;
  Just hear him boom and drum!
You'd think that he was telling
  The soldier-boys to come.

The swallows and the chimney swifts
  Good masons seem to be;
Their bills like trowels, plaster mud
  Or glue sticks carefully.

Sweet Madam Oriole weaves a bag
  And hangs it in a tree;
Her needle is her bill, with which
  She labors skillfully.

The best of all housekeepers
  Is tidy Jenny Wren;
She makes a home of anything
  That comes within her ken.

Bob White and Mr. Meadow Lark
  Good farmers try to be,
And build their homes out in the fields,—
  Great Nature's granary.

* * * * *

The bird-world's full of busy folk
  In field and bush and tree;
And people, too, must find their work
  To meet life happily.

A. E. B.

PART FIVE

Bird Song

Answer to a Child's Question

Do you ask what the birds say? The sparrow, the dove,
The linnet, and thrush say, "I love and I love!"
In the winter they're silent, the wind is so strong;
What it says I don't know, but it sings a loud song.
But green leaves and blossoms, and sunny warm weather,
And singing, and loving, all come back together.
Then the lark is so brimful of gladness and love,
The green fields below him, the blue sky above,
That he sings, and he sings, and forever sings he,
"I love my Love, and my Love loves me."

Coleridge

The little bird sits at his door in the sun,
Atilt like a blossom among the leaves,
And lets his illumined being o'errun
With the deluge of summer it receives;
His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,
And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings;
He sings to the wide world, and she to her nest,—
In the nice ear of Nature which song is the best?

Lowell: "The Vision of Sir Launfal"

Birds' Music

The little leaves upon the trees
  Are written o'er with notes and words,
The pretty madrigals and glees
  Sung by the merry minstrel birds.

Their teacher is the Wind, I know;
  For while they're busy at their song,
He turns the music quickly, so
  The tune may smoothly move along.

So all through summer time they sing,
  And make the woods and meadows sweet,
And teach the brooks, soft murmuring,
  Their dainty carols to repeat.

And when, at last, their lessons done,
  The winter brings a frosty day,
Their teacher takes them, one by one,
  Their music, too, and goes away.

Frank Dempster Sherman

Morning In Birdland

At one in the morning,
All's silent in Birdland, all bright eyes are curtained,
and folded all wings.

At two in the morning,
Some dreaming young thing a snatch of its daytime
roundelay sings.

At three in the morning,
Early-Bird chides his neighbors, and then falls asleep
unaware!

At four in the morning,
All merry and mad, pour a medley of song on the
quivering air.

Edith M. Thomas

*The Way to Sing

The birds must know. Who wisely sings
  Will sing as they;
The common air has generous wings,
  Songs make their way.
No messenger to run before,
  Devising plan;
No mention of the place or hour
  To any man;
No waiting till some sound betrays
  A listening ear;
No different voice, no new delays,
  If steps draw near.

"What bird is that? Its song is good."
  And eager eyes
Go peering through the dusky wood,
  In glad surprise.
Then late at night, when by his fire
  The traveller sits,
Watching the flame grow brighter, higher,
  The sweet song flits
By snatches through his weary brain
  To help him rest;
When next he goes that road again,
  An empty nest
On leafless bough will make him sigh,
  "Ah me! last spring
Just here I heard, in passing by,
  That rare bird sing!"

But while he sighs, remembering
  How sweet the song,
The little bird on tireless wing,
  Is borne along
In other air, and other men
  With weary feet,
On other roads, the simple strain
  Are finding sweet.
The birds must know. Who wisely sings
  Will sing as they;
The common air has generous wings,
  Songs make their way.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Then will the birds sing anthems; for the earth and sky
  and air
Will seem a great cathedral, filled with beings dear and
  fair;
And long processions, from the time that bluebird
  notes begin
Till gentians fade, through forest-aisles will still move
  out and in.

Lucy Larcom

---

*NOTE.—Reprinted by permission of Little, Brown & Co.

Spring Twilight

Singing in the rain, robin?
  Rippling out so fast
All thy flute-like notes, as if
  This singing were thy last!

After sundown, too, robin?
  Though the fields are dim,
And the trees grow dark and still,
  Dripping from leaf and limb.

'Tis heart-broken music—
  That sweet, faltering strain,—
Like a mingled memory,
  Half ecstasy, half pain.

Surely thus to sing, robin
  Thou must have in sight
Beautiful skies behind the shower,
  And dawn beyond the night.

Would thy faith were mine, robin!
  Then, though night were long,
All its silent hours should melt
  Their sorrow into song.

E. R. Sill

Do you ne'er think what wondrous beings these?
  Do you ne'er think who made them, and who taught
The dialect they speak, where melodies
  Alone are the interpreters of thought?
Whose household words are songs in many keys,
  Sweeter than instrument of man e'er caught!
Whose habitations in the treetops even
  Are half-way houses on the road to heaven!

Think, every morning when the sun peeps through
  The dim, leaf-latticed windows of the grove,
How jubilant the happy birds renew
  Their old, melodious madrigals of love!
And when you think of this, remember, too,
  'Tis always morning somewhere, and above
The awakening continents, from shore to shore,
  Somewhere the birds are singing evermore.

Longfellow: "Birds of Killingworth"

Interlude

Interlude

The nesting-time is o'er, the nestlings flown;
The forests and the meadows hushed have grown
Save for a stray song; though the earth's astir
With drowsy insect hordes which hum and whir.

The quiet songsters hide away from view
While donning winter plumage, fresh and new;
And then in flocks they gather and alight
In feeding-grounds, upon their southward flight.

* * * * *

The autumn woods are radiant and fair,
But oh, the poignant silence reigning there!
'Tis like a home, with rarest beauty filled,
Where children's happy voices have been stilled.

A. E. B.

PART SIX

Fall Migration

Fall Migration

JULY 1st to OCTOBER 31st

Tree Swallow

SEPTEMBER 1st to 10th

Orchard Oriole

SEPTEMBER 10th to 20th

Baltimore Oriole
Yellow Warbler

SEPTEMBER 20th to 30th

Ruby-throated Humming-bird
Kingbird
Wood Pewee
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Spotted Sandpiper
Purple Martin

OCTOBER 1st to 10th

Barn Swallow
Chimney Swift
Ovenbird
Wood Thrush
Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Bobolink
Indigo Bunting
Scarlet Tanager

OCTOBER 10th to 31st

Red-eyed Vireo
Maryland Yellow-throat
Whip-poor-will
Nighthawk
Phoebe
Towhee
House Wren
Brown Thrasher
Catbird

NOVEMBER 1st to 30th

Field Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow
Purple Grackle
Red-winged Blackbird
Cowbird
Mourning Dove
*Meadowlark
Kingfisher
Robin
Bluebird
*Red-headed Woodpecker
*Flicker
*Goldfinch
*Song Sparrow

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*NOTE.—Irregular migrants; in some localities, permanent residents. Occasionally the robin and the bluebird winter in the north.

The Flight of the Birds

Whither away, Robin,
Whither away?
Is it through envy of the maple-leaf,
Whose blushes mock the crimson of thy breast,
Thou wilt not stay?
The summer days were long, yet all too brief
The happy season thou hast been our guest:
Whither away?

Whither away, Bluebird,
Whither away?
The blast is chill, yet in the upper sky
Thou still canst find the color of thy wing,
The hue of May.
Warbler, why speed thy southern flight? Ah, why,
Thou too, whose song first told us of the Spring?
Whither away?

Whither away, Swallow,
Whither away?
Canst thou no longer tarry in the North,
Here, where our roof so well hath screened thy nest?
Not one short day?
Wilt thou—as if thou human wert—go forth
And wanton far from them who love thee best?
Whither away?

Edmund Clarence Stedman

*To a Waterfowl

Whither, midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler's eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As, darkly painted on the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

Seek'st thou the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,
Or where the rocky billows rise and sink
On the chafed ocean-tide?

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,—
The desert and illimitable air,—
Lone wandering, but not lost.

* * * * * *

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven
Hath swallowed up thy form; yet on my heart
Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou hast given,
And shall not soon depart.

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

William Cullen Bryant

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I go to prove my soul!
I see my way as birds their trackless way.
I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,
I ask not: but unless God send his hail
Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,
In some time, his good time, I shall arrive:
He guides me and the bird.

Browning: From "Paracelsus"

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